

DFEH News Brief

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State Leaders Inaugurate California's Civil Rights Heroes

Harvey Milk, Speaker Karen Bass among heroes honored to mark fifty years of California's landmark Fair Employment and Housing Act

Sacramento – State civil rights leaders gathered today to honor four outstanding individuals who have broken race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability barriers to contribute to California's rich history of diversity.

The 2009 California Civil Rights Heroes are:

- **Harvey Milk:** Mr. Milk was an American politician and the first openly gay man to be elected to public office in California, as a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. Milk was murdered on November 27th 1978. Mr. Milk's nephew, Stuart Milk, accepted this award on behalf of his uncle.
- **Assembly Speaker Karen Bass:** Speaker Bass has been a State Assembly Member representing Los Angeles' 47th Assembly District since 2005. In May 2008, she made history when the Los Angeles Democrat became the 67th Speaker of the California State Assembly, catapulting a Democratic woman to the post for the first time in the state's history. Along with the California political first, Speaker Bass makes national history as the first African American woman in the country to serve in this powerful state legislative role.
- **Dionicio Morales:** A lifelong advocate, Mr. Morales spent the majority of his years championing the rights of Mexican immigrants. In 1963, he founded a community-based non-profit service organization, the Mexican American Opportunity Foundation (MAOF). He passed away on September 24th, 2008. Mr. Morales' son, Timothy Morales, accepted this award on behalf of his father.
- **Robert David Hall:** Mr. Hall is an actor who currently plays the coroner Dr. Albert Robbins on the Emmy-nominated CSI: Crime Scene Investigation. In 1978, an 18-wheel truck struck Hall's car and he was severely burned when his gas tank exploded, leading to the amputation of both legs. Today, he walks comfortably on two prosthetic limbs. Hall proudly serves on the board of directors of the National Organization on Disability. In 2008, he founded the I AM PWD campaign (Inclusion in the Arts & Media of People With Disabilities) where he currently serves as the committee chairman. Fellow I AM PWD member and disability rights activist, Scott Krantz, accepted this award on behalf of Robert David Hall.

Today's awards kick off a year of state sponsored events commemorating the 50th Anniversary of California's landmark civil rights law, the Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA). Public and private entities will collaborate with the Department of Fair Employment Housing to honor California's achievements under the FEHA, provide education about the State's civil rights protections, and promote equitable practices in employment, housing, and public accommodation. For a complete list of events, lesson plans and community activity ideas please visit: www.dfeh.ca.gov.

"As the single most comprehensive civil rights law in our nation, the FEHA has protected millions of Californians from discrimination," said Department of Fair Employment and Housing Director Phyllis Cheng. "This year, we celebrate a half-century of the Act's revolutionizing workplace behavior and making sure Californians find a place to live that is free of discrimination."

The Fair Employment and Housing Act is the leading state civil rights law in the nation. The Act predates and provides broader protections than its federal counterparts, Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1968 Fair Housing Act. The FEHA was initially enacted as the Fair Employment Practices Act (FEPA) in 1959. Adoption of the Rumford Fair Housing Act followed in 1963. In 1980, the FEPA and the Rumford Act were combined and renamed as the FEHA to protect Californians from both employment and housing discrimination.

The mission of the DFEH is to protect the people of California from unlawful discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations and from hate violence.

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